

"U.S. Embassy Zagreb Supports Heating Project for Roma Refugees and Displaced Persons"

This winter a group of entry level Foreign Service officers and specialists implemented a grant from the J. Kirby Simon Trust to provide heating to a community of Roma refugees and displaced persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

The community of eight families with 33 members was living in housing without heating. To survive the winter the families shared one oven to heat the entire house. One third of the community is children who sleep in a room directly above the oven.

The grant from The J. Kirby Simon Trust provided 2000 USD to purchase five stoves to evenly distribute heat throughout the housing, and thus reduce the fire hazard posed by one stove at high temperatures. The last of these stoves was delivered in February 2009 during one of the harshest winters in recent memory.

The Roma community and Embassy participants discussed the social integration challenges facing this Roma community. One member commented that "we exist because you are here." This statement emphasized the isolation felt by many such groups, and the importance of embassies reaching out to local communities.

The Embassy participants are grateful to the trustees of The J. Kirby Simon Trust who approved this project, and to the NGO "The Civic Rights Project -Sisak" for all of their support and assistance. For more information on projects supported by J. Kirby Simon Trust please visit their web site at www.kirbysimontrust.org.





